

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6193

INFO AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

AMEMBASSY CARACAS

AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

AMEMBASSY KINGSTON

AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

AMCONSUL MEDELLIN

AMEMBASSY MEXICO

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

PANCANAL

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 PANAMA 7997/1

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PN, CU

SUBJECT: TORRIJOS VISIT TO CUBA: ASSESSMENT FROM PANAMA

SUMMARY: THIS MESSAGE OFFERS EMBASSY'S ANALYSIS OF TORRIJOS' GOALS IN MAKING HIS JANUARY 10-15, 1976 TRIP TO CUBA, ASSESSMENT OF TRIP'S IMPACT ON UNITED STATES-PANAMA RELATIONS IN GENERAL, AND ON CANAL TREATY NEGOTIATIONS IN PARTICULAR, AND WHAT THE UNITED STATES CAN DO TO INFLUENCE TORRIJOS' HANDLING OF HIMSELF AND HIS STATEMENTS WHILE IN CUBA. EMBASSY'S JUDGMENT IS THAT TORRIJOS WILL SEEK TO PARLAY HIS STATE VISIT TO HAVANA, THE ANTICIPATED MAMMOTH RECEPTION TO BE ACCORDED HIM THERE, AND THE ATTENDANT PUBLICITY SURROUNDING HIS APPEARANCES TO (1) ENHANCE AND MAGNIFY HIS SELF-IMAGE AS A HEMISPHERIC
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AND THIRD WORLD LEADER, (2) TEMPORARILY ALLEVIATE CRITICISM

OF HIM AND OF HIS CURRENT POLICIES FROM LEFTIST ELEMENTS IN PANAMA, AND (3) INCREASE WORLDWIDE AWARENESS OF THE CANAL ISSUE AND PANAMA'S "JUST CAUSE". TORRIJOS' PERCEPTION OF PROSPECTS FOR TREATY NEGOTIATIONS WILL BE THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR IN MODERATING OR EXACERBATING THE TONE AND CONTENT OF HIS REMARKS VIS-A-VIS THE UNITED STATES WHILE IN CUBA. WE HAVE SENSITIZED TORRIJOS DIRECTLY AND THROUGH ADVISERS TO EXPECT SOME ADVERSE REACTION IN THE UNITED STATES, AND HE IS AWARE OF PROBLEM THAT VISIT CREATES FOR US. FOR HIM, HOWEVER, THE POTENTIAL POLITICAL GAINS TO BE DERIVED FROM ENHANCING HIS HEMISPHERIC IMAGE AND FROM COUNTERING DOMESTIC LEFTIST CRITICISM MAY OUTWEIGH ANY CAVEATS WE CAN TENDER. WHILE HIS PRIMARY AUDIENCE WILL BE THE PANAMANIAN PUBLIC, HE IS ALSO INTERESTED IN MAXIMUM PUBLICITY ABROAD AND HAS INVITED SEVERAL U.S. JOURNALISTS TO ACCOMPANY HIM. A SUCCESSFUL TRIP FROM TORRIJOS' STANDPOINT SHOULD AFFORD HIM AN EXTRA MEASURE OF DOMESTIC STABILITY AND CONSEQUENT SELF-CONFIDENCE FOR ACCEPTING ACCOMMODATIONS IN THE CANAL TREATY NEGOTIATIONS. END SUMMARY.

1. INCREASED INTERNATIONAL STATURE. THROUGH HIS FREQUENT TRAVELS, AND HIS AT TIMES COMBATIVE, AT TIMES PATIENT, STATEMENTS ON PANAMA, HER STATUS, AND HER "CAUSE", TORRIJOS HAS CREATED IN SOME PANAMANIAN MINDS AT LEAST AN IMAGE OF HIMSELF AS A HEMISPHERIC, IF NOT INDEED, THIRD WORLD FIGURE. HIS VISIT TO CUBA WILL PLAY TO THAT IMAGE. HE IS EXPECTING A FULL-SCALE CROWD TURNOUT FROM HIS HOSTS, AND WE SHARE THAT EXPECTATION. FURTHER, TORRIJOS IS NOT JUST HEAD OF GOVERNMENT HERE, BUT ALSO SUPREME REVOLUTIONARY LEADER. THE Juxtaposition of that facet of his position to this hemisphere's revolutionary par excellence will not be lost on TORRIJOS, ON ANY OF HIS AUDIENCES, OR ON FIDEL CASTRO. CUBA'S REVOLUTION WILL BE COMPARED TO THE "PANAMANIAN REVOLUTION". AND WHILE THE MANY SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE TWO NATIONS' HISTORIES, ESPECIALLY WITH RESPECT TO THE INFLUENCE AND INTERFERENCE OF THE UNITED STATES ON BOTH, WILL NOT PASS UNREMARKED, WE UNDERSTAND TORRIJOS' PRESS COORDINATOR WILL POINT OUT TO JOURNALISTS THE OBVIOUS DIFFERENCES IN THE TWO REVOLUTIONS. THAT THE TWO COUNTRIES HAVE SOUGHT SEPARATE PATHS TO REVOLUTION AND TORRIJOS HAS SOUGHT A "PANAMANIAN ASPIRIN FOR PANAMA'S

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HEADACHE" WILL BE EMPHASIZED.

2. NEVERTHELESS, THE HEADY ATMOSPHERE WE FORESEE IN HAVANA WOULD BE INTOXICATING TO EVEN MORE SOBER LEADERS. TORRIJOS EXALTED, RAISES PANAMA IN ITS OWN ESTIMATION AND BROADCASTS ITS CANAL "CAUSE" BEFORE THE INTERNATIONAL EYE. IN ADDITION TO THE PUBLICITY THE TRIP WILL RECEIVE, TORRIJOS HAS INDICATED TO AMBASSADOR THAT HE INTENDS TO ENCOURAGE CASTRO TO STRENGTHEN

HIS LINKS WITH LATIN AMERICA. REPORTEDLY HE WILL BEAR THIS MESSAGE ON BEHALF OF THE PRESIDENTS OF COSTA RICA, COLOMBIA AND VENEZUELA. FINALLY, ONE OF TORRIJOS' STATED OBJECTIVES FOR THIS TRIP IS TO FORMALLY INVITE THE CUBAN PREMIER TO NEXT JUNE'S CONFERENCE OF LATIN AMERICAN HEADS OF STATE, THE AMPHICTYONIC CONGRESS, FOR WHICH PANAMA IS HOST. (WE UNDERSTAND CASTRO HAS ALREADY TOLD PANAMA HE WILL ATTEND THE CONFERENCE.) THIS CONFERENCE WOULD FURTHER CUBA'S ACCEPTABILITY AS RESTORED MEMBER, EVEN IF NOT COMPLETELY IN GOOD STANDING, OF THE LATIN AMERICAN COMMUNITY.

3. IMPACT ON DOMESTIC CRITICS IN PANAMA. THE PRESTIGE AND PUBLICITY TORRIJOS WILL HARVEST FROM HIS VISIT NOT ONLY WILL AID HIS PERCEIVED STANDING IN LATIN AMERICA AND ELSEWHERE, BUT, MORE IMPORTANTLY, WILL HELP HIM MATERIALLY ON THE DOMESTIC SCENE. THE LENGTH OF THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS, THE UNRESOLVED DIFFICULTIES ON A NUMBER OF TREATY ISSUES, HINTS OF COMPROMISE BY PANAMA'S NEGOTIATORS, UNITED STATES ELECTORAL SENSITIVITIES, AND RECENT POLICY AND PERSONNEL CHANGES IN THE GOP TO REASSURE THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY HAVE CREATED TENSION BETWEEN TORRIJOS AND LEFTIST ELEMENTS HERE. TRANQUILITY IN PANAMA'S DOMESTIC POLITICS DURING THE CANAL TREATY NEGOTIATING PROCESS DEPENDS TO CONSIDERABLE DEGREE UPON THE CONTINUATION OF SUPPORT FOR TORRIJOS FROM THE MODERATE LEFT, AND THE ACQUIESCENCE OF THE RADICALS. THE JOURNEY TO HAVANA, THEREFORE, WILL BE CAST AS SOME FORM OF RECOMPENSE TO THESE GROUPS AND WILL BRIGHTEN HIS IMAGE AS A REVOLUTIONARY LEADER. IT WILL BE PERCEIVED HERE AS IN LINE WITH PANAMA'S PUBLIC POLICY OF ERASING ITS FORMER IMAGE OF "DEPENDENCE" ON THE UNITED STATES, AND WILL BE WELCOME BALM TO THOSE ELEMENTS WHOSE ESTIMATION OF TORRIJOS HAS BEEN ABRADED BY HIS RECENT SERIES OF "ZAGS" RIGHTWARDS. TORRIJOS HIMSELF ESTIMATED RECENTLY IN CONFIDENTIAL

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VERSATION WITH AMBASSADOR, THAT THE CUBA VISIT MAY "BUY" HIM SIX MONTHS OF PEACE FOR THE NEGOTIATIONS. JUST HOW MUCH TIME AND HOW MUCH OF A "BUY" TORRIJOS WILL GAIN THROUGH THIS TRIP REMAINS TO BE SEEN, BUT NO ONE DOUBTS THAT THE TRIP WILL BE USEFUL TO TORRIJOS IN COUNTERING PRESSURE FROM HIS RESTIVE CRITICS ON THE LEFT.

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4. TREATY NEGOTIATIONS: THE HAVANA PLATFORM. CERTAINLY ONE GOAL OF THE TRIP WILL BE TO GAIN PUBLICITY FOR PANAMA'S CAUSE IN THE UNITED STATES, AND WE UNDERSTAND TORRIJOS HAS INVITED A NUMBER OF U.S. JOURNALISTS TO ACCOMPANY HIM. BUT HOW HE WILL CHARACTERIZE THE PROGRESS AND TENOR OF CANAL NEGOTIATIONS IN HAVANA IS OBVIOUSLY DIRECTLY RELATED TO THE COURSE OF THE NEGOTIATIONS, THEIR NEAR-TERM PROSPECTS OF SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS, AND HOW HE WILL JUDGE IT BEST TO PRESSURE OR ENCOURAGE THE UNITED STATES TO CONCLUDE A TREATY SATISFACTORY TO HIM AND TO PANAMA. THE UNITED STATES HAS INDICATED TO HIM THAT NO TREATY IS LIKELY TO BE SUBMITTED FOR RATIFICATION IN 1976. HE HAS ACCEPTED THAT PUBLICLY, BUT THE ABSENCE OF VISIBLE NEGOTIATING PROGRESS GIVES RISE TO DOMESTIC POLITICAL PROBLEMS FOR HIM. WE HAVE REITERATED TO

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HIM HOW TOUCH OUR PUBLIC, BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY, CONGRESSIONAL REACTION TO HIS VISIT COULD BE. NEVERTHELESS HIS PERCEPTION OF PROGRESS IN THE NEGOTIATIONS WILL BE THE PRIME

DETERMINANT OF HIS DECISION OF WHETHER, AND HOW, TO PRESSURE US, DESPITE HIS REALIZATION OF THE PERILS OF DOING SO FROM SUCH A SENSITIVE PODIUM. WE ARE CONVINCED, HOWEVER, THAT TORRIJOS WILL NOT BE ADDRESSING THE DOMESTIC UNITED STATES AUDIENCE PRIMARILY. HIS CHIEF CONCERNS WILL BE TO MANIFEST PANAMA'S NEW STATURE, AND, HIS OWN, BEFORE LATIN AMERICA AND THE PANAMANIAN PEOPLE. ANY EFFORTS TO SENSITIZE HIM TO OUR NEEDS MUST BE BALANCED AGAINST THE PRESSURES HE WEIGHS FROM PANAMA AND FROM AN INTERNATIONAL CONSTITUENCY WHICH HAS BEEN SUPPORTIVE OF PANAMA'S ASPIRATIONS OVER THE CANAL ISSUE.

5. WHAT CAN WE EXPECT? EIGHTY PEOPLE REPORTEDLY WILL ACCOMPANY TORRIJOS ON THE TRIP. ABOUT 60 OF THESE WILL BE PANAMANIAN FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE. REPORTEDLY A MAJORITY OF THE 60 PERSONS WILL BE MODERATES AND CONSERVATIVES. THE OTHER 20 MEMBERS OF THE PARTY WILL BE JOURNALISTS. THE PANAMANIAN EXPECT TO RECEIVE A MASSIVE AND FRIENDLY RECEPTION IN CUBA, WITH PERHAPS A MILLION PEOPLE IN THE INITIAL CROWD. CASTRO WILL HAIL TORRIJOS AS A FELLOW FIGHTER IN THEIR NATIONS' SHARED STRUGGLE TO DEVELOP ECONOMICALLY, BREAK THE POWER OF THE ENTRENCHED OLIGARCHY, AND CHART AN INDEPENDENT COURSE IN FOREIGN POLICY--WITH NO DOUBT A FAIRLY POINTED REFERENCE TO ONE FREE FROM UNITED STATES DOMINATION. IT GOES WITHOUT SAYING THAT THE "REVOLUTIONARY" ASPECTS OF TORRIJOS' REGIME WILL RECEIVE STAR BILLING. PANAMA'S JOINING THE NON-ALIGNED GROUP OF NATIONS WILL BE COMMENDED. TORRIJOS WILL COMMENT ON LATIN AMERICA'S QUEST FOR REAL NATIONAL AND ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE, ON RECENT LATIN INITIATIVES TO COORDINATE ON ECONOMIC MATTERS AND PLUMP FOR THE AMPHICTYONIC CONFERENCE. WE SHOULD EXPECT THAT DURING THE TRIP TORRIJOS WILL PRAISE CUBAN ACHIEVEMENTS IN RURAL HEALTH AND EDUCATION. IT HAS BEEN ANNOUNCED HERE THAT PANAMA INTENDS TO SIGN SOME FORM OF AGREEMENT WITH CUBA IN THE RURAL HEALTH FIELD, AND THAT THERE WILL BE SOME AGREEMENT TO EXCHANGE AGRICULTURAL EXPERTISE--CUBA TO ASSIST PANAMA'S SUGAR AND DAIRY INDUSTRIES, PANAMA TO RECIPROCATATE ON BANANAS. ANY SUCH AGREEMENTS WILL PROBABLY BE DEALT WITH IN A JOINT COMMUNIQUE. THE COMMUNIQUE WILL, WE ALSO BELIEVE, CALL FOR INCREASED BILATERAL COOPERATION IN AREAS OF ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RELATIONS. THIS IS OUR CONFIDENTIAL

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ESTIMATION OF THE "BOTTOM LINE".

6. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS. THE FOREGOING PARAGRAPH OUTLINES WHAT WE REGARD AS LIKELY TO OCCUR. WHAT ELSE TORRIJOS, AND HIS CUBAN HOSTS, MAY DO AND SAY IS LESS PREDICTABLE. HOW MODERATE OR OTHERWISE TORRIJOS' ACTIONS AND STATEMENTS WILL BE WILL DEPEND ON THE GOALS AND PRESSURES DISCUSSED ABOVE. SEVERAL EMBASSY SOURCES HAVE SAID THAT TORRIJOS DOES NOT INTENT TO LAMBAST THE UNITED STATES, OR TO ESPOUSE ANY THIRD WORLD CAUSE PARTICULARLY NOXIOUS TO THE UNITED STATES.

THAT TORRIJOS DESIRES MAXIMUM PUBLICITY FROM HIS VISIT, BOTH IN PANAMA AND ABROAD, IS CLEAR FROM HIS INVITATIONS TO NEWS CORRESPONDENTS DAVID BINDER (NEW YORK TIMES), JEREMIAH O'LEARY (WASHINGTON STAR), MICHAEL THARP (WALL STREET JOURNAL), AND POSSIBLY OTHER PROMINENT U.S. NEWSMEN TO ACCOMPANY HIM. THERE WILL BE ALSO, OF COURSE, A PHALANX OF PANAMANIAN REPORTERS ALONG.

7. POSSIBLE GAIN. DESPITE ADVERSE EFFECTS OF THIS VISIT IN THE UNITED STATES, EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT THERE MAY BE ONE PLUS TO TRIP. IF TORRIJOS JUDGES HIS STANDING ENHANCED AND HIS LEFTIST DOMESTIC CRITICS TEMPORARILY APPEASED, HIS SELF-CONFIDENCE WILL BE BOLSTERED. THIS FACTOR MAY THEN STRENGTHEN HIS WILL AND ABILITY TO CONTINUE MANAGING HIS END OF THE NEGOTIATIONS AND TO DEFEND HIS COMPROMISES IN THEM.
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